PLANET COMICS

PLANET COMICS

No. 63
WINTER 10c

FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES

Paradise or Inferno?

HUNT BOWMAN BATTLES TO PRESERVE HIS CITADEL OF FREEDOM FROM VOLTAN VENGEANCE IN

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PLANET COMICS, No. 63, Winter, 1949. Published quarterly by Love Romances Pub. Co., Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. T. T. Scott, Pres.; J. F. Byrne, Mgr. Editor. Re-entered as second-class matter July 8, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Contents copyrighted, 1949, by Love Romances Pub. Co., Inc. Yearly subscription in U. S. $.40; Foreign $.60. Single copies 10¢ in U. S. For advertising rates: Advertising Director, Fiction House, Inc., 670 Fifth Avenue, New York 19, N. Y. Printed in U. S. A.

The LOST WORLD

BY THORNECLIFF HERRICK

FREEDOM IS BORN SLOWLY AND PAINFULLY IN THE MINDS OF MAN. THUS HUNT BOWMAN CONVINCED THE EARTHPEOPLE, SUFFERING UNDER THE CRUEL TYRANNY OF VOLTA, THAT KNOWLEDGE WOULD BE THEIR DEADLIEST WEAPON AGAINST THEIR CONQUEROR. AND SO THE SCHOOL OF SCIENTIFIC REHABILITATION WAS STARTED AT ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND, TO TEACH THE YOUNG TO CARRY ON THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION.

I'M BORED WITH THIS SILLY GUARD DUTY, RONNIE. AND I DON'T LIKE THIS OLD SCHOOL, EITHER. WORK, WORK - WE NEVER HAVE ANY FUN!

BUT TED, ALL THE KIDS TAKE TURNS AT GUARD! IT'S VERY IMPORTANT STUFF! REMEMBER, HUNT BOWMAN SAID...

...THE SAFETY OF THE WHOLE SCHOOL DEPENDS UPON OUR ALERTNESS. WHY, WITHOUT THIS RADAR WARNING DEVICE, A VOLTAN SPACER WOULD SNEAK UP AND...

AW, NUTS - YOU SOUND JUST LIKE HUNT BOWMAN. NOW. YOU DON'T SEE HIM STANDING GUARD. LOOK!

WELL, THAT JUST ABOUT DOES IT, LYSSA. AS SOON AS THE KIDS PACK THE HUNTING NETS, WE'LL BE READY TO LEAVE!

SO I NOTICE, HUNT. BUT TELL ME, I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING OUT FOR FOOD. YOU WON'T NEED THE PORTABLE RADIO, WILL YOU?

OH YES, I WILL, LYSSA! REMEMBER YOUR CLASS IN RADIO TODAY? WELL, I'VE DECIDED TO TEST THE RANGE OF OUR SETS WHILE I'M OUT!

THAT'S AN EXCELLENT IDEA! IT NEVER ENTERED MY MIND WE COULD... WAIT—SOMEONE'S CALLING YOU!

MR. BOWMAN—MR. BOWMAN—COME ON—EVERYTHING'S LOADED ON THE CART NOW. WE'RE WAITING FOR YOU!

OKAY, BOYS, I'LL BE RIGHT WITH YOU! SO LONG FOR A WHILE, LYSSA! KEEP YOUR EARS ON THAT RADIO. I'LL TRY TO MAKE CONTACT WITH YOU PRETTY SOON!

SO LONG, BOYS,— SO LONG, HUNT—TAKE CARE OF YOURSELVES! I HOPE YOU BAG PLENTY OF GAME FOR THE SCHOOL.

THERE THEY GO—BRAVE LITTLE EARTHMEN—BATTLING TO STAY ALIVE EVEN UNDER VOLTAN RULE. WITH THEIR COURAGE AND SPIRIT, SOMEDAY WE'LL WIN—I KNOW WE WILL!

MEANWHILE...

LOOK AT THEM, RONNIE, THEY'RE GOING OUT TO HAVE FUN, AND WE'RE STUCK UP HERE WITH NOTHING TO DO. WAIT—I FORGOT ABOUT THAT RAY GUN DOWN THERE!

TED—WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHERE ARE YOU GOING? NO, DON'T...

COME BACK, TED, YOU KNOW YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO LEAVE YOUR POST! IF ANYONE FINDS OUT, YOU'LL BE PUNISHED!

AW, DON'T BE SUCH A FRAIDY CAT, RONNIE! I'M ONLY GOING DOWN TO LOOK AT THE RAY GUN. NO HARM IN THAT, IS THERE?

MEANWHILE, NOT FAR FROM THE SCHOOL AT ANNAPOLIS, A SLOW-MOVING VOLTAN RECONNAISSANCE CRUISER WHEELS IN LARGE CIRCLES THROUGH THE CLOUDLESS EARTH SKY, AS THOUGH SEARCHING...

LOOK, CAPTAIN, THE LIGHT ON THE BIO-RAY LOCATOR AGAIN FLASHES. IT ANOTHER GROUP OF EARTH-PEOPLE REGISTERS!

EXCELLENT, NOW THE EXACT COORDINATES FROM HOLOGRAPH ME GIVE. I ON THIS CHART THEM WILL PLOT!

AZIMOTH 87°...DEFLECTION -6. BAH-THIS RECONNAISSANCE FOOLISH IS! WE THESE EARTH DOGS SHOULD BE BLASTING, NOT MARKING, CAPTAIN!

SILENCE, FOOL! IF MIGHTY AZTARN THE LOCATION DESIRES, WE THEM FOR HIM SHALL GET!

NEVER FEAR—WHEN THE TIME COMES, THEY SHALL CRUSHED BE. IN THE MEANTIME, WE A JOB TO DO HAVE!

YES, CAPTAIN, BUT I IT UNDER-STAND CANNOT. WAIT—THE LIGHT AGAIN!

AS...

OH, BOY, WHAT LUCK, MR. BOWMAN! LOOK AT THAT DEER STANDING IN THE BUSHES OVER THERE!

I SEE IT, BOYS! NOW KEEP VERY QUIET OR WE'LL FRIGHTEN IT OFF! HURRY, LET'S GO BACK AND GET THE NETS! I'LL TEACH YOU HOW TO SNARE HIM!

HERE'S THE NET, MR. BOWMAN, BUT, GEE, I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO SHOOT HIM WITH YOUR BOW AND ARROW!

NOT THIS TIME BOYS, I WANT TO SHOW YOU HOW TO TRACK ONE AND GET IT WITHOUT SHOOTING!

NOW REMEMBER THIS, WHEN YOU'RE OUT HUNTING, APPROACH YOUR GAME WITHOUT MAKING A SOUND, AND KEEP THE BREEZE IN YOUR FACE SO HE DOESN'T GET YOUR SCENT!

HEY, MR. BOWMAN, LOOK WHAT'S COMING AT US!

GOOD LORD—A WILD BOAR! GET BACK, BOYS, HE LOOKS MEAN! I'LL HAVE TO USE MY WEAPON—IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!

WHILE...

THE ANTENNA YOU SEE BEHIND ME, BOYS, IS FOR A RADIO WITH LONG RANGE, BUT THIS PORTABLE TRANSMITTER CARRIES ITS OWN AERIAL!

GOSH, THAT'S A KEEN SET, MISS LYSSA, BUT HOW FAR CAN YOU SEND YOUR VOICE WITH IT?

WHY, IT'LL GO UP TO FIVE OR SIX MILES, MIKE! WAIT—I'LL TUNE IT ON MR. BOWMAN'S SET! HE'S TRYING TO GET IN TOUCH... WAIT—WHAT'S THAT?

AS...

LOOK OUT, BOYS, HE'S STARTING TO CHARGE US!

THAT'S HUNT VOICE! SOMETHING'S GONE WRONG—HE'S IN DANGER!

HURRY, MR. BOWMAN, SHOOT! HE'S HEADING RIGHT FOR YOU!

DON'T WORRY, YOU JUST STAY OUT OF THE WAY! I'LL TAKE CARE OF THIS BEAST—THERE!

OHH—MY SHOOT WENT WIDE—I JUST GRAZED HIM! NOW I'M REALLY IN FOR SOME TROUBLE!

THE WOUND IS DRIVING HIM BERSERK! I WON'T HAVE TIME TO SET MYSELF FOR ANOTHER SHOT. WAIT—THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO!

MEANWHILE... TED—PLEASE STOP PLAYING WITH THAT VOLTAN RAY GUN! MR. BOWMAN TOLD US TO KEEP THE KIDS AWAY FROM IT AND NOT TO TOUCH IT OURSELVES!

AW, G'WAN, I'M NOT GOING TO HURT THE SILLY OLD GUN! ANYWAY, THIS IS BETTER THAN STANDING AROUND DOING NOTHING!

YEAH, BUT SUPPOSE SOMEBODY COMES ALONG AND SEES US? THEN WE'LL BOTH BE IN TROUBLE. WAIT, TED, THAT FUNNY NOISE... WHAT IS IT?

GOSH, I DON'T KNOW, RONNIE! I PUSHED THIS LITTLE HANDLE HERE AND NOW THE GUN'S STARTING TO CLICK!

AS... HE'S COMING RIGHT AT ME! I'LL WAIT UNTIL HE'S ON TOP OF ME, THEN...

I'VE GOT TO JUMP AND USE THIS ARROW LIKE A KNIFE! IF I MISS YOU NOW, I'M A GONER!

THERE—THAT DID IT! OKAY, BOYS, ASSEMBLE! I DON'T THINK WE'LL HAVE ANY MORE TROUBLE NOW! HE'S DEAD!

LOOK OUT, CHILDREN— THAT FLASH! IT'S FROM A RAY-GUN!

PHEW—HE SURE MADE A MESS OF OUR CART, THOUGH! COME ON, LET'S GET OUR STUFF TOGETHER!

GOLLY, MR. BOWMAN—YOU SURE MADE SHORT WORK OF... LISTEN—THE RADIO! IT SOUNDS LIKE MISS LYSSA'S VOICE!

As...

GOLLY, RONNIE, LOOK—THE GUN'S STARTING TO MOVE AROUND! I CAN'T STOP IT!

HURRY, TED, DO SOMETHING! IT'S POINTED RIGHT AT THE RADIO TOWER! OHH... WHAT'S THAT?

IT'S FIRING, RONNIE! WHAT'LL I DO? OH GOSH, I'M SCARED! MR. BOWMAN AND MISS LYSSA WILL DO SOMETHING TO ME WHEN THEY FIND OUT! I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY!

NO, TEDDY—DON'T RUN AWAY—THEY'LL BLAME IT ALL ON ME!

Meanwhile...

RUN—THE BUILDING'S FALLING APART! WE'LL ALL BE KILLED!

DON'T BE FRIGHTENED, BOYS—STAY TOGETHER AND FOLLOW ME. WE'LL MAKE IT ALL RIGHT! WAIT...

THOSE TWO KIDS ARE RUNNING RIGHT PAST THE TOWER—IT'S TUMBLING! THEY'LL BE KILLED IF I DON'T HURRY!

As cruising nearby...

CAPTAIN—AT THE VIZIO-SCREEN LOOK! THOSE BLASTS FROM RAY GUN ARE!

YES, I KNOW—AND NO VOLTAN'S DOWN THERE ARE. THE EARTHMEN A RAY GUN MUST HAVE.

QUICKLY, PILOT. NEAR THOSE BUILDINGS IMMEDIATELY LAND! WE FOR THAT WEAPON MUST SEARCH!

VERY GOOD, CAPTAIN! THE PATROL INTERESTING MAY GET IF EARTH SCUM WE HUNT!

GIVE ME YOUR HANDS, NOW, LET'S ALL RUN—FAST! THAT WAS CLOSE! NOW I'VE GOT TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED!

LATER... THERE, THERE, RONNIE - IT'S ALL OVER NOW! PLEASE STOP CRYING, IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT! WAIT - HUNT - YOU'RE BACK!

YES, LYSSA - WHAT IS IT? WHAT HAPPENED? I HEARD YOUR VOICE ON THE RADIO...

IT SOUNDED AS THOUGH YOU WERE BEING BLASTED BY THE VOLTANS! I ROUNDED UP THE BOYS AND HURRIED BACK AS SOON AS I COULD!

THANK HEAVENS YOU DID, HUNT! WE WERE BLASTED ALL RIGHT, BUT NOT BY VOLTANS! REMEMBER THE CAPTURED VOLTAN RAY GUN WE WERE GOING TO USE FOR THE DEMONSTRATION?

WELL, TED AND RONNIE WERE DOING THEIR TOUR OF GUARD - AND TED GOT BORED, SO HE THOUGHT HE'D PLAY WITH THE GUN. HE TOUCHED IT AND IT WENT OFF! ISN'T THAT RIGHT, RONNIE?

YES, MR. BOWMAN, BUT HONESTLY, HE DIDN'T MEAN ANY HARM! HE'S GONE - AND YOU'VE GOT TO FIND HIM! HE'S ALL ALONE IN THE WOODS!

MEANWHILE...

REPELLO - LANDING JETS RELEASED HAVE BEEN, CAPTAIN! WE COMING DOWN ARE!

VERY WELL, THEN - FOR SHOOTING MISSION YOURSELVES PREPARE. AND YOUR WEAPONS IN FIRING ORDER BE SURE ARE!

WE READY ARE, CAPTAIN! WHICH WAY DO WE GO?

ME FOLLOW AND ON YOUR GUARD BE! WE TO THOSE BUILDINGS WILL HASTEN AND... WAIT - THAT NOISE!

LOOK - IT AN EARTHLING BOY IS! HE FROM THE BUSHES RUN! QUICKLY - HIM SEIZE!

OH - VOLTANS! WHAT'LL I DO? IT'S TOO LATE TO ESCAPE FROM THEM! GOLLY - NOW I'M **REALLY** IN TROUBLE!

SOON...

OH, HUNT, DO YOU THINK WE'LL FIND TED? I HATE TO THINK OF WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO HIM OUT THERE ALL BY HIMSELF!

IT SHOULDN'T BE TOO DIFFICULT TO TRACK HIM, LYSSA. THESE BOYS I BROUGHT WITH US ARE WELL-TRAINED IN WOODCRAFT!.. HOLD ON— LOOK AT THIS!

THERE—I TOLD YOU IT WOULDN'T TOO HARD. THESE ARE TED'S FOOTPRINTS! HE'S LEAVING A TRAIL A BLIND MAN COULD FOLLOW! WHAT?

MR. BOWMAN— COME HERE, QUICK! LOOK WHAT I FOUND!

WHAT GOT YOU SO EXCITED, KERMIT? I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING OVER HERE!

LOOK CLOSER AT THAT SPOT OVER THERE, MR. BOWMAN. SIGN OF A STRUGGLE— AND THEN LOTS OF FOOTPRINTS LEADING AWAY FROM IT!

YOU'RE RIGHT, KERMIT! LET'S GO, BOYS, WE'RE GOING TO DOG THESE TRACKS! AND KEEP YOUR WEAPONS HANDY. IF MY SUSPICIONS ARE CORRECT—I THINK WE'LL NEED THEM VERY SOON!

MEANWHILE...

WE VERY FORTUNATE ARE, MEN! NOW WE THIS BOY CAN QUESTION TO FIND OUT IF OTHER EARTHMEN AROUND HERE ARE! ALL RIGHT, BOY, SPEAK!

GOSH—THEY WANT ME TO SNITCH ON MR. BOWMAN AND THE OTHERS! BUT I WON'T DO IT—I CAN'T!

COME, EARTH SPAWN, SPEAK, I SAID! WHERE OTHER EARTHMEN ARE? IN THE BUILDINGS? HOW MANY? ANSWER, I SAY!

LET ME GO, YOU BEAST! I WON'T TELL YOU! NEVER-NEVER!

SO—YOU LITTLE HERO WANT TO BE! ALL RIGHT—I TEN SECOS YOU WILL GIVE! IF YOU ANSWER DO NOT—YOU WILL SUFFER!

CAPTAIN— CAPTAIN—LOOK— FROM THE WOODS COMING!

LOOK, HUNT, IT'S A VOLTAN PATROL—AND THEY'VE CAPTURED TED!

JUST AS I FEARED, LYSSA! ALL RIGHT, BOYS, AIM CAREFULLY. WE MUSTN'T HIT TED! KEEP ME COVERED WHILE I DASH OVER THERE!

EARTHMEN, CAPTAIN—THEY US ARE ATTACKING!

LET THEM—THEY FAR CANNOT GET! IT OUR RAY BLASTERS AGAINST THEIR PUNY WEAPONS IS! SHOOT!

HURRY, YOU FOOLS, THEM BLAST BEFORE THEY TOO NEAR COME. LOOK, ONE DOG UPON ME ALMOST IS!

OH—I WOUNDED AM! YOU ALONE MUST THEM BLAST, CAPTAIN!

GEE WHIZ—IT'S HUNT AND THE OTHER KIDS! THEY'VE COME TO SAVE ME! I'VE GOTTA HELP THEM!

NOW, STUPID DOG, FIRST YOU, THEN THE OTHERS I KILL SHALL!

I'VE GOT TO GET THIS VOLTAN BEFORE HE SQUEEZES THAT TRIGGER OR I'M A GONER! WAIT—WHAT'S THAT?

I'VE GOT HIS ARM, MR. BOWMAN! HIT HIM, QUICK!

THANKS, TED, I DON'T NEED A SECOND INVITATION FOR THAT! THERE—THAT'LL DO IT!

OHH!

LATER...

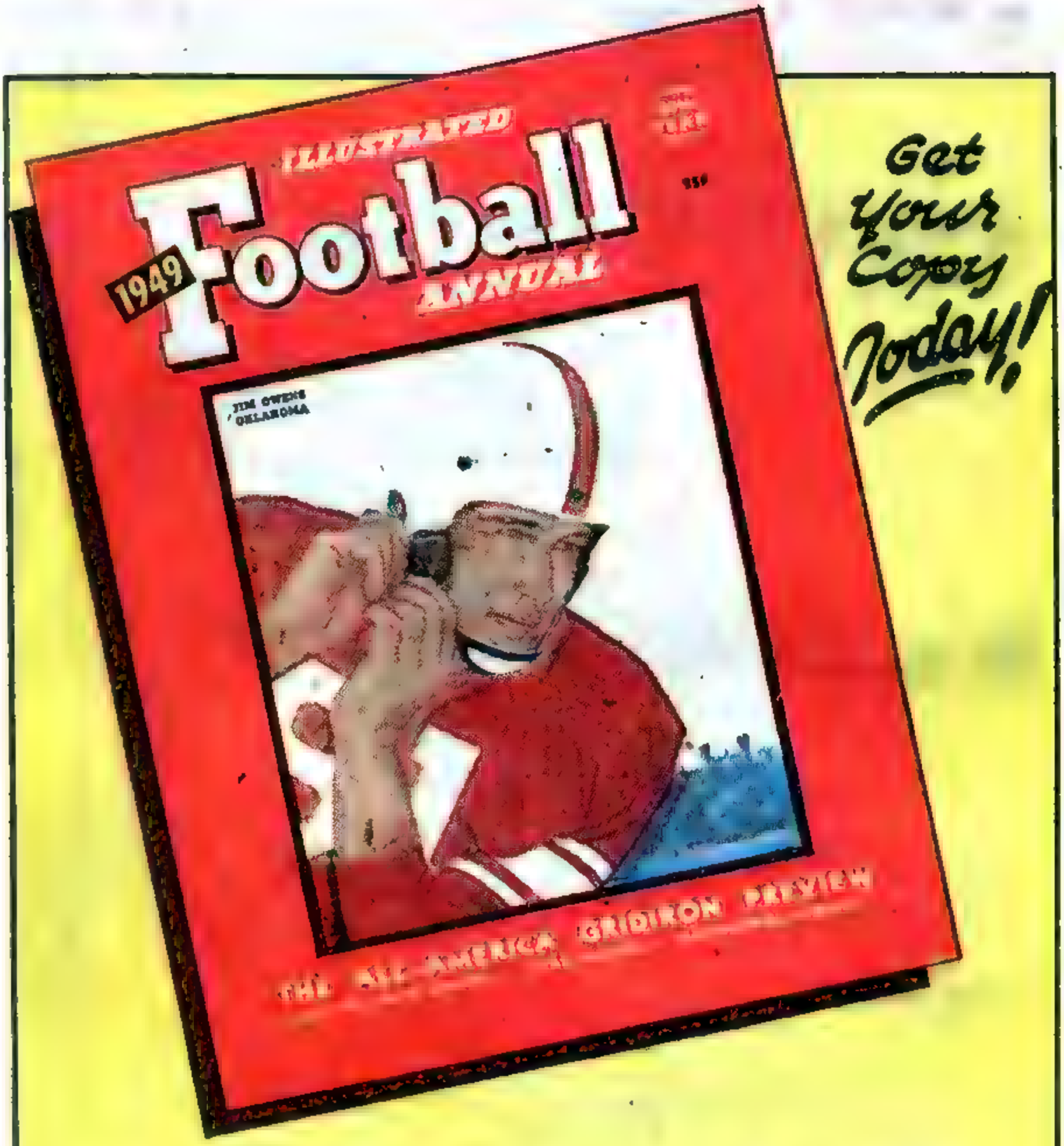
HUNT—TED'S A LITTLE BASHFUL, BUT I THINK HE HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO YOU! GO AHEAD, TED!

GOSH, MR. BOWMAN, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY! I'M SORRY I WAS SUCH A BABY AND...

NOT ANOTHER WORD, TED, THE PAST IS FORGOTTEN! ANYWAY, WE DIDN'T DO SO BADLY TODAY! WE BAGGED A BOAR, A SPACER, AND THREE VOLTANS. IT LOOKS LIKE WE EARTHLINGS WON A ROUND FOR A CHANGE!

GEE, MR. BOWMAN, WE SURE DID! AND WE'LL WIN MORE, TOO. JUST WAIT AND SEE!

LOST WORLD IN EVERY ISSUE OF PLANET COMICS!



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SPACE RANGERS

by HUGH FITZHUGH

THE DISCOVERIES OF THE SCIENTIFIC BOARD ON TERRA WERE JEALOUSLY GUARDED SECRETS, KEPT INTACT BY FLINT BAKER AND OTHER SPACE RANGERS OF THE SECURITY SQUAD. CONSTANT PATROLS CIRCLED THE LABORATORY, WHERE BUSY SCIENTISTS DIPPED INTO MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE, EVER SEARCHING FOR KNOWLEDGE...

I'M CERTAINLY GLAD I'VE FINISHED WORK ON THAT HUMANOID ROBOT FOR THE SPACE RANGERS. NOW I CAN GET BACK TO MY BIO-CHEMICAL RESEARCH! WAIT—WHAT'S THAT?

INTRUDERS—HOW DID YOU GET PAST THE GUARD? GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE I SOUND THE ALARM!

TAKE IT EASY, DOC, OR I'LL SOUND YOUR DEATH KNELL WITH THIS BLASTER. OKAY, CHANDA, LET'S GO!

DON'T LOOK SO PUZZLED. XERO NEVER FLUFFS A JOB. I TIMED THIS ONE PERFECTLY TO GET PAST YOUR RANGER NURSEMAIDS!

YOU FOOLS—YOU BROKE AN ELECTRONIC BEAM WHEN YOU ENTERED! THE RANGERS WILL BE HERE ANY SECOND!

SO WHAT? THE FAMOUS DOC HOLGOR IS GOING TO DISAPPEAR RIGHT UNDER THE NOSES OF THOSE SPACE CUB SCOUTS!

YEAH-BUT WE'D BETTER GO INTO OUR VANISHING ACT, XERO, LOOK WHAT'S COMING!

IT'S A RANGER GROUND CRUISER, BUT DON'T GET EXCITED, BABY, I'LL GIVE THOSE BOYS A RUN FOR THEIR CREDITS!

WELL, LET'S GO, XERO, I WON'T FEEL SAFE UNTIL WE'RE UNDER WAY FOR STELLA NOVA!

OKAY, CHANDA, HOLD TIGHT-I'M GOING TO OPEN THIS TERRACER UP TO MACH 1.5! THOSE RANGERS'LL THINK THEY'RE STANDING STILL!

NICE GOING, XERO, WE'RE LOSING THEM NOW! LOOK-THERE'S THE SPACE PORT!

DO YOU THINK WE'LL HAVE ANY TROUBLE GETTING CLEARANCE FROM THE TOWER, XERO?

WHY SHOULD WE, CHANDA? ALL OUR FLIGHT PAPERS ARE IN ORDER! NEXT STOP— STELLA NOVA!

AS IN THE CONTROL TOWER...

I THOUGHT SINCE I WAS CONTROL OFFICER, TODAY, I'D EXPLAIN THE PROCEDURE TO YOU, HERC. LOOK-THERE'S A TERRACER HEADING FOR LAUNCHING TUBE 5!

GOLLY-THIS TOWER IS SURE INTERESTING! I WONDER WHAT THIS IS?

NOW AS SOON AS THEY GET INTO THEIR SPACER AND SIGNAL FOR FLIGHT CLEARANCE, I'LL CHECK THEIR PAPERS AND... HERC, ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME? WHAT?

GOOD GRIEF-GET AWAY FROM THAT TUBE POWER RELEASE, YOU LITTLE SQUIRT! TOO LATE- YOU'VE FIRED THE TUBES!

LOOK—THERE GOES THE SHIP FROM TUBE FIVE WITHOUT FLIGHT AUTHORIZATION! HERC, I COULD BRAIN YOU!

GEE WHIZ, FLINT, I DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT, HONEST I DIDN'T! IT WAS AN ACCIDENT.

AN ACCIDENT, EH? DO YOU THINK THE SPACE PORT COMMANDER IS GOING TO ACCEPT A WEAK EXCUSE LIKE THAT FROM ME?

HE MAY, FLINT, IF YOU EXPLAIN. WAIT—SOMEONE'S COMING!

HEY, BAKER, DID YOU JUST ALLOW THAT SPACER TO BLAST OFF FROM TUBE FIVE?

WELL...ER...MORE OR LESS, MEN! WHAT HAPPENED? WHY AREN'T YOU FELLOWS ON PATROL AROUND THE LAB BUILDING?

WE WERE, BAKER, WHEN WE GOT THE ALARM SIGNAL! HOLGOR'S BEEN KIDNAPPED, AND YOU'VE PERMITTED HIS KIDNAPPER TO ESCAPE!

OH, NO—NOT THAT! WHAT A MESS I'M IN NOW! LISTEN, BOYS, TAKE OVER HERE, I'VE GOT TO REPORT TO H.Q. COME ON, BUTTER FINGERS, YOU'RE GOING TOO!

SOON, AT SPACER H.Q...

OKAY, QUIET NOW, HERC, THE VIZI-GRAPH'S ON! I'M TRYING STELLA NOVA'S AIR WAVES TO SEE IF I CAN PICK UP SOMETHING.

AND I'VE GOT TO! THE COMMANDER SAID HE'D DEMOTE ME IF I DIDN'T GET A LINE ON THESE KIDNAPPERS! WAIT... I'M GETTING AN IMAGE!

PLANET STELLA NOVA CALLING SPACE RANGERS HEADQUARTERS.

THIS IS XERO ON STELLA NOVA! WE HAVE DOCTOR HOLGOR—AND FOR HIS LIFE WE WANT THE HUMANOID ROBOT HE DEVELOPED!

AND GET THIS—ONE MAN DELIVERS THE ROBOT—NO TRICKS, OR HOLGOR DIES! THAT IS ALL!

LATER...

THERE'S THE ROBOT, FLINT! GET IT TO STELLA NOVA AND BRING BACK HOLGOR. WE CAN'T SACRIFICE HIS LIFE FOR THIS ROBOT!

RIGHT, COMMANDER, AND THANKS FOR THE CHANCE TO MAKE UP FOR THAT BONEHEAD PLAY I PULLED BEFORE!

UH-OH-THERE'S FLINT AND THE COMMANDER! GOOD-THEY'RE NOT WATCHING THE SPACER!

NOW'S MY CHANCE TO SNEAK IN! I'VE GOT TO GO ALONG AND HELP FLINT! I CAN'T HAVE HIM SORE AT ME FOR WHAT I DID!

SOON...

THIS IS COMMANDER TRURO, FLINT—RUNWAY Z-4 IS CLEAR FOR TAKE-OFF! OFFICAL CLEARANCE GRANTED! IT'S ALL YOURS NOW—AND GOOD LUCK!

JETS WHINE THEIR SONG OF POWER, AND WITH A RUSH OF SPEED, THE SPACE SHIP ZOOMS INTO THE AIR. DESTINATION STELLA NOVA!

NOT LONG AFTER...

LOOK, CHANDA-THERE'S THE RANGER SHIP HEADED HERE! I'M GOING TO CONTACT HIM AND GUIDE HIM IN!

STELLA NOVA TO RANGER! GOOD TO SEE YOU, SUCKER! SET COURSE AZIMUTH 125° HIT ELECTRO BEAM, FREQUENCY A!

GOLLY-THAT GUY XERO IS CALLING FLINT ON THE VIZIO ALREADY.

WE'LL BE LANDING SOON, AND I HAVEN'T EVEN FIGURED OUT HOW I CAN HELP...WAIT-WHAT'S THIS? OH BOY-HERE'S THE THING I NEED RIGHT IN THE BAGGAGE HOLD. WON'T FLINT BE SURPRISED WHEN I PULL THIS SCHEME!

OON... WELL, WELL, I SEE YOU LIVED UP TO YOUR PART OF THE BARGAIN - ALL HONORABLE BUSINESS, EH, BAKER?

RIGHT, XERO, YOU GOT THE HUMANOID ROBOT! NOW HAND OVER HOLGOR SO I CAN LEAVE THIS SLIMY PLACE OF YOURS!

GET THIS GENIUS, CHANDA HE THINKS I'M GIVING UP HOLGOR - THE BEST SCIENTIFIC BRAIN IT THE UNIVERSE! THAT'S A HOT ONE!

WHY YOU DIRTY FOUR-FLUSHER! I'LL...

YOU'RE NOT PULLING A DOUBLE-CROSS ON ME AND GETTING AWAY WITH IT! MAYBE THIS'LL TEACH YOU TO KEEP YOUR WORD!

OOH!

AND MAYBE THIS WILL TEACH YOU TO STOP TRYING TO BE A HERO, RANGER!

LATER, A STRANGE SCENE IS SET IN THE HIDEOUT OF XERO...

ALL RIGHT, DOC, BAKER IS IN THE PIT WITH YOUR BRAIN-CHILD! GET ON THE CONTROL PANEL - AND NO MONKEY-BUSINESS... THIS BLASTER ISN'T A TOY!

IT... IT'S INHUMAN, I TELL YOU, XERO! BUT YOU WIN!

THAT'S BETTER, DOC! MAKE OUT THIS IS AN EXPERIMENT. IF YOUR ROBOT WORKS RIGHT, XERO WILL RULE THE UNIVERSE WITH IT!

YOU SAID A MOUTHFUL, BABY! LOOK - FLINT'S COMING TO JUST IN TIME! THE ROBOT IS HEADED FOR HIM!

WHERE AM I? WHAT THE... THAT ROBOT'S REACHING FOR ME! HOLY SMOKES - I KNOW WHAT IT CAN DO TO ME! WAIT - WHAT'S THAT?

XERO - SOMETHING'S GONE HAYWIRE! THE ROBOT'S TURNING FROM BAKER AND STARTING TO CLIMB OUT OF THE PIT!

DO SOMETHING, DOC! TURN IT OFF - STOP IT FROM COMING UP HERE - HURRY!

I CAN'T - THE MECHANISM MUST BE FAULTY. IT WON'T RESPOND ANY MORE! AND YOU CAN'T ZAP IT! I BUILT IT RAY PROOF!

HERE IT COMES - I'VE GOT TO BLAST IT! THE DOC WAS RIGHT. THE RAYS BOUNCE OFF! TOO LATE - IT'S ON TOP OF ME!

RUN, XERO, THE ROBOT GRABBED YOUR BLASTER - NOW HE'S TOSSING IT TO BAKER!

YOU'RE RIGHT, CHANDA, IT'S OUR ONLY OUT HEAD FOR THE DOOR!

SWIFTLY...

LOOK - BAKER'S BLOCKING THE EXIT - BUT I'LL TAKE CARE OF HIM, CHANDA!

MAYBE SO, XERO, BUT YOU'LL ALSO HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF THIS PARA-RAY! HERE - THIS SHOULD TAKE THE FIGHT OUT OF BOTH OF YOU!

RUSH HIM, XERO, BEFORE HE SQUEEZES THAT TRIGGER. IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!

OKAY, CHANDA, YOU GO FOR HIM ON ONE SIDE AND I'LL TAKE THE OTHER - WAIT... TOO LATE... OHH!

LATER...

I STILL CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHY THAT ROBOT ACTED THE WAY IT DID! COME ON, LET'S... LOOK! IT'S HERC!

HIYA, FLINT, I HOPE YOU WON'T GET SORE AT ME AGAIN! I JUST HAD TO EVEN THE SCORE WITH THOSE CROOKS!

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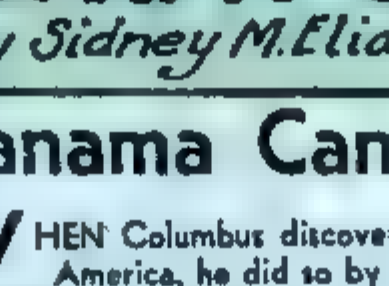
STAMPS
by Sidney M. Elias

Panama Canal

WHEN Columbus discovered America, he did so by accident, for his prime purpose in crossing the Atlantic was to find a shorter route to China. The explorers who followed Columbus searched for over 50 years for a water way across the American continent before they were convinced that there was none. They did however realize, that a canal could be cut across Nicaragua or Panama and thus their ships could sail on to China: Spain in 1551, needed such a canal for the treasure ships which carried the Incas' gold and silver from Peru, had to stop on the Pacific side of Panama and the treasure hauled overland to waiting ships on the Atlantic side. Nothing was done about building a canal until 1881, when a French company began actual work on a canal across Panama. Due to corruption, disease and lack of funds, the work on the canal ceased in 1889. In 1894 a new French company was formed and work on the canal was resumed.



In the meantime, the United States was planning another canal across Nicaragua which would be nearer to American ports on both coasts. Realizing that competition would be injurious to their investment and knowing also that their new company lacked the funds to complete the canal, the French company sold its interests in 1904 to the United States. A year prior to this, Panama separated from Colombia and declared its independence. The United States entered into negotiations with the new government whereby control of a strip of land 10 miles wide would be leased for the purpose of building and operating the canal. Construction of the canal was again resumed in 1904 after its purchase and 10 years later on August 14, 1914, the canal was completed and opened to traffic.

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STAR PIRATE

BY LEN DODSON

FURTIVE-EYED, THE LONE GIRL EMERGED FROM THE SHADOWS OF THE KRYPTON CITY MONEY VAULTS. AT HER SMALL SPACESHIP, SHE PAUSED TO SEE IF ANYONE FOLLOWED HER. AND SOON AFTER SHE BLASTED OFF, HER TERROR VOICE CRACKLED OUT OVER THE MICROWAVES: "HELP! HELP! SPACE PIRATES ARE AFTER ME!" STAR PIRATE HEARD THAT VOICE AS IT DIED IN THE STATIC, AND SECONDS LATER...

JUN RINA JR.

THAT CALL FOR HELP CAME FROM THIS AREA, BUT I DON'T SEE ANY SIGN OF A SPACE-SHIP, BLACKY!

NOT A THING, STAR- WAIT! LOOK DOWN THERE!

MUST BE HER! THOSE CROOKS FORCED HER SHIP DOWN. SIT TIGHT, WHILE I LAND.

OH, PLEASE DON'T TAKE THAT MONEY! IT'S FOR CHARITY, I...

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME, SISTER- OUR HOME! WHAT'LL WE DO WITH HER, KORE?

WE GOT WHAT WE WANT! LET'S GET OUTTA HERE BEFORE VISITORS DROP IN!

UP TO YOUR OLD TRICKS, EH, KORE? STEALING FROM DEFENSELESS WOMEN!

STAR PIRATE! BAM! HIT THE SPACESHIP, MEN- I'LL HANDLE THIS GUY!

CAN'T MISS AT THIS RANGE- WHAT! HE JUMPED CLEAR! COME ON, GUN THIS SHIP OFF!

WOW! CLOSE- BUT MY ANTI-GRAV BOOTS PULLED ME CLEAR! THEY'RE GETTING AWAY.

LATER, BACK AT STAR'S LABORATORY...

SOON...

THEY'RE GONE! THAT MONEY WAS A DONATION TO MY SCHOOL FOR POOR CHILDREN. I'LL NEVER GET IT BACK NOW!

THERE, THERE- I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO, MISS. CONTACT ME ON THE VIDEO LATER. C'MON, BLACKY!

WHEW! LOOKS LIKE THERE'LL BE NO DATE WITH MY GAL, FLURA, UNLESS I CAN RUSTLE UP SOME CASH - FAST!

HEY! WHAT'RE YOU DOIN', STAR?

SHH... I'M READING YOUR MIND. LET ME SEE...

COST OF DATE
EATS - 20 CREDITS
DRINKS-15 "
RIDE 103 "
PRESENT FOR FLURA 125 "
243 TOTAL

READIN' MY MIND? ARE YOU NUTS?

NOT QUITE! BUT YOU'LL BE, UNLESS YOU GET 243 CREDITS TO TAKE YOUR BABE, FLURA, OUT!

FLURA! 243 CREDS - SAY, HOW'D YOU KNOW THAT? YOU COULDN'T SEE WHAT I WROTE ON THAT PAD!

SIMPLE. THAT'S A NEW TELE-PAD I INVENTED. WHAT'S WRITTEN ON THERE IS TRANSCRIBED INTO THAT SPECIAL MICRO RADIO. WAIT - THE VIDEO!

HMM.. I THOUGHT READIN' MACHINE, EH? THE SPACE-MEN'S CAFE... A LOTTA CROOKS ON THE LAM HANG OUT THERE... HEY! I'VE GOT AN IDEA!

OH, IT'S YOU! YES, I'VE BEEN GIVING THAT ROBBERY SOME THOUGHT, AND I'D LIKE TO MEET YOU IN TEN MINUTES!

SOON...

DID YOU GET ANY CLUES TO THEIR WHEREABOUTS, STAR? HELLO... WHAT'S THAT?

A LITTLE DEVICE I INVENTED – A SORT OF PORTABLE POCKET VIDEO. WITH THIS, I HOPE TO TRACE THOSE CROOKS...

LOOK ON THE SCREEN. DO YOU SEE ANYTHING?

WHY, IT'S VAGUE... BUT SOMETHING SEEMS TO BE FORMING. LOOKS LIKE A SPACE DIVE OF SOME KIND...

MEANWHILE, AT THE SPACEMEN'S CAFE...

GREETINGS, GENTLEMEN. I AM ZARA. OF THE MAGYAR. FOR A SMALL FEE I WILL DEMONSTRATE MY MENTAL POWERS OF READING YOUR MIND.

MIND READER, EH? I THINK YOU'RE A FAKE.

SURE, HE'S AS PHONY AS HE LOOKS! GIVE HIM A STIFF BET, KORE – TAKE SOME OF HIS DOUGH!

SURE, SURE – SINCE THAT LAST JOB, WE'VE GOT PLENTY TO SQUANDER. COME HERE, YOU OLD BUZZARD.

NOW LOOK, I'M BETTING ONE THOUSAND CREDITS YOU CAN'T READ MY MIND.

ALL RIGHT, FRIEND – YOU'RE ON!

JUST SCRIBBLE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THAT PAD ON THE TABLE, WHILE I TURN MY BACK THUSLY.

HAH! WOTTA SUCKER. THIS IS GONNA BE EASY. LET'S SEE... "ONE OF THESE DAYS, I'M GONNA BUMP INTO STAR PIRATE – AND WHEN I DO..."

...GONNA BUMP INTO STAR PIRATE – AND WHEN I DO...

YOU'RE THINKING OF WHAT YOU'RE GOIN' TO DO TO STAR PIRATE, PAL— FOR BUTTIN' IN ON THAT LAST JOB YOU PULLED.

WHAT! IT—IT'S UNCANNY. HE COULDN'T HAVE SEEN—HE COULDN'T KNOW! YET...

HERE, I'LL TAKE THAT THOUSAND CREDITS.

THAT WAS A DEMONSTRATION, FOLKS—ANY MORE BETS?

I STILL DON'T BELIEVE IT. HERE, ONE THOUSAND.

YO! FIVE HUNDRED HERE...

AND SOON THIS STRANGE BEARDED SWAMI FROM THE MYSTERIOUS MAGYAR LANDS HAS CLEANED OUT THE SPACEMEN'S CAFE OF MONEY, WINNING EACH AND EVERY BET, UNTIL...

AHOY. I'M JUST IN FROM CALLISTO, MATE. I'VE BEEN HEARING STORIES ABOUT YOU— AND I THINK THEY'RE THE BUNK.

MONEY TALKS, STRANGER.

A FEW MINUTES LATER...

...THOSE ARE YOUR THOUGHTS, MY FRIEND. CONVINCED?

I SURE AM! THAT'S A THOUSAND CREDITS I OWE YOU. CAN YOU CHANGE A FIVE THOUSAND CREDIT BILL?

HA, HA! A PLEASURE. I'VE CLEANED UP JUST ABOUT ENOUGH TO COVER THAT. HERE YOU ARE, SIR.

THANK YOU. SAY...

LOOK OUT— YOUR TURBAN'S CAUGHT ON THAT CHANDELIER!

UGH! THOSE CROOKS ARE WATCHING!

SO! A CHEAT! LOOK, KORE—THAT GADGET...

YEAH! CLEANED US OUTTA THAT LOOT BY A TRICK MICRO RADIO! PRETTY CLEVER, BUT...

HEY! WHAT'S HE BUTTIN' IN FOR?

OOF! FORCE BLAST!

NOT SPORTING OF ALL YOU GUYS JUMPING ONE!

OKAY, CHUM – BEAT IT OUT THE BACK DOOR, WHILE I HOLD THEM OFF!

THAT'S FUNNY! I TAKE HIS DOUGH, AND HE HELPS ME OUT OF THIS JAM. OH BOY! AND I'VE STILL GOT HIS FIVE THOUSAND CREDIT NOTE!

LATER, AT STAR'S LAB...

HERE IT IS, MISS – EVERY CREDIT STOLEN FROM YOU – INTACT!

HMM... SOMETHING LOOKS FISHY ABOUT THIS FIVE THOUSAND CREDIT NOTE. IT ALMOST LOOKS FAKE.

I CAN NEVER REPAY YOU, STAR – BUT I STILL CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHY YOU WANTED THE COUNTERFEIT FIVE THOUSAND CREDIT NOTE BEFORE.

ER, A FRIEND OF MINE NEEDED IT TO PAY SOME BAD DEBTS, MISS.

HEY, THAT'S FUNNY, STAR – THIS FIVE G NOTE IS A PHONY TOO, AND I GAVE THE REAL CREDITS IN CHANGE TO A STRANGER... CROOK! I – WAIT! I GET IT NOW – THE STRANGER WAS YOU! HEH-HEH, JUST ONE OF MY LITTLE JOKES – Y'SEE I KNEW IT WAS YOU ALL THE TIME!

SURE, AND I BET YOU WERE GOING TO DONATE IT TO CHARITY, ANYWAY! THAT MAKES US SQUARE, PAL!

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THE VELVET FEET

By ROSS GALLUN

I SHOULD have known better, of course! I'm not exactly an amateur at these matters, and my scientific reputation is a sound one, founded on solid achievement in the field of bio-physics. But even the best of us blunder at times. And, after all, there's one thing you must say for me after reading this—when I make a mistake I don't indulge in half measures. I go all the way. Even to the brink of death!

It happened on a Thursday afternoon. Catherine had been working with me in the lab, and we were discussing, in general terms, the possible success or failure of my current experiment.

Catherine said: "Imagine—the great Harry Cawthorne stumped! I can hardly believe it."

She can be a sweet girl at times, can Catherine, but there are other times when she gets on the nerves. This was one of those times. She was needling me because, up until now, I had failed dismally in my efforts to find a formula which would cause shrinkage of the basic micro-cell in living tissue. Already I had solved the problem of expanding the same cells and had produced a form of giantism in animals and plants. I could, had I wanted, have also produced the same results with human beings, but I will never, knowingly, tamper so with the bodies of men and women. Now, reading the foregoing line, I have to laugh a little bitterly. It reflects, but how ironically, how I felt about matters before *IT* happened.

As I say, I had been trying to shrink the basic cells, and to bring about a dwarf species of plants and animals. Over three hundred experiments and still failure. It is small wonder, then, that her remarks rankled. Scientists, in spite of their reputations for calm and stolidity, can sometimes be as giddy as opera singers. I blew up.

"Shut that mouth of yours," I told her. "I'm running things in this lab. You're here to assist me, that's all. When I want any of your cheap advice I'll ask you for it. Now get back to work—we don't stop tonight until this culture is completed."

Catherine stared at me. She flushed until her face was a beet red. "I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't mean to . . ."

The rage was still burning in me. Rage, actually, at myself. I would have struck her had I dared. Instead, in my anger, I kicked the cat! Poor old Tom, who at the moment was rubbing his arched back against my leg!

Tom sailed across the floor like a furry kite. I had kicked hard. When he stopped skidding he spat at me, every hair on end, and then ran to hide beneath a table.

"Harry!" Catherine was angry now. "You're acting like a spoiled school boy. The idea—kicking a cat, a pet, because your old experiment isn't panning out. You should be ashamed of yourself!"

I was ashamed. My anger left me as swiftly as it had come. I picked up the open test tube on which I had been working and handed it across the table to her. *It* must have happened then. I've already admitted that I should have known better than to handle the stuff so carelessly, but I was nervous over having made such a fool of myself, and I didn't notice the open glass of water standing on the table. One drop, which would have been more than enough, of the culture must have fallen from the side of the test tube. Must have fallen into the glass of water. And neither of us noticed it!

I told Catherine I was sorry for acting such a fool. "Wait till I feed the mice and lock them up, then we'll quit for the day," I said. "Maybe go out and get something to eat. I guess I owe you a steak. Guess I owe Tom something, too. I'll bring the old fellow some liver tomorrow when I come."

All this time I was busy gathering up the white mice from the glassed cage on the table, and putting them back into their reglar cages on the walls. Of Tom there was no sign, and I suspected him of sulking beneath the table and awaiting a chance to claw me in revenge. I could not know, then, that *IT* would happen in a very few minutes.

When I had finished I turned to see Catherine drinking from the glass of water. She extended a small tin box toward me. "Have an aspirin, Harry. It might help. I worked up a little headache this afternoon."

Without really wanting or needing the aspirin I accepted it, and washed it down with a swig of the tepid water.

IT began to happen!

Catherine screamed "Harry! Something is wrong! I-I'm growing smaller! Oh, Harry, help me. Y-your formula!"

Of course. My formula! I'd hit it at last, without ever knowing, and a drop of the stuff had fallen into the glass of water. We drank. And now *IT* was happening. Such is

the wonder of the scientific mind that I could observe, with interest, and without any particular fear, the thing that was happening to us. Although knowing that exactly the same changes were occuring in me, I was fascinated by the sight of Catherine.

She stopped shrinking perhaps two minutes after her first outcry. Only just in time, I must say, because when the micro-cellular reaction ceased she was a bare three inches tall. She was standing close to me, fear etched on her face and tears in her eyes. I wondered that she was so little changed, except for size, and then realized that it was because I was also only three inches tall. Relatively she was the same as before.

What an idiot I must have sounded. I said: "Don't worry, Catherine. It'll be all right. We'll just have to spend the night like this and, when Carl comes to work in the morning he'll prepare some of the giantism formula and we'll grow again. Really it's quite a lark—remember Alice in Wonderland . . ."

She was not listening. She was staring over my shoulder. Her mouth was a round, red O of horror! I have never seen such mortal terror before.

She screamed again. "Harry! The cat!"

Yes! The cat. Good old Tom, whom I had kicked only moments before. I know, now, how our first ancestors must have felt when they stared up into the yawning jaws of some giant prehistoric monster! Tom was huge! Tom was immense! His yellow eyes were shining pools of hatred. A red tongue licked and licked out of a pink cavern set with feral white fangs. A rank, sour odor came from him, an odor I had never noticed before. His tail twitched, and even as I stood frozen to the spot he made a movement with one paw and unsheathed long pale claws.

Tom crouched, moving his body in the sinuous motion common to the great cats before they spring for the kill. Saber-toothed tiger, I thought! And we were completely at his mercy. Oddly enough, my brain was functioning perfectly—I even thought of how I had handled the white mice just before *IT* happened. The scent of those mice was upon me now, which was in itself enough to spell my doom.

Catherine screamed once more and flung herself against me. My own urge for survival came flooding back. Perhaps there was still a chance. I gathered the girl in my arms and began to run. Around the leg of the table, looming like a giant redwood tree, and across the slick floor. Behind we was the stealthly pad of feet. At any moment I expected to feel the sharp claws biting into my flesh.

Tom would play with us, of course. Hold us in his mouth, never biting quite hard enough to kill. He would lie, snarling softly, with his great paw over us for a time. Perhaps he would let us run away, once or twice, waiting until we had gone some little distance. Then, with one great leap, he would have us again. I wondered if I would squeal like a mouse when I died!

I saw the broom then. A common kitchen broom. It loomed like a forest of bamboo. In a moment, still carrying Catherine, who had fainted now, I darted into the protecting thicket of broom straw. I burrowed as deeply as I could and waited for the cat's next move. It soon came. With a rending, cruching sound a paw came into the broom forest, curving cruelly, bending and probing and seeking. A dozen times those claws almost hooked into my flesh. At last Tom seemed to give up. I dared not peer out of our haven, but I knew he had not gone far. Soon I heard the thunder of his purr. He was watching—and waiting!

What a night that was. Catherine regained consciousness soon, and we comforted one another as best we might, while praying for morning and the arrival of my other assistant, Carl. Several times Tom came back to sniff and poke at the broom, and it was plain that he was puzzled.

We lived! I would not have written this otherwise. When Carl came in early, coughing and yawning, we had another bad moment or two. When his trousered legs stood like two blue serge pillars, close to the broom, Catherine and myself took a deep breath and ran for it. The fuzzy stuff of his clothing made hard climbing, but we made it, climbing for our lives, and the claws of the cat missed us by a tenth of an inch.

What use to recount Carl's surprise, his yell, his first conviction that he was going mad, when we appeared on his shoulder. I screamed into his ear and he afterward said it was the faintest of whispers. But he mixed the proper formula and brought an eye dropper, and soon we regained our normal size.

Catherine quit immediately. But not before she had slapped my face. And a funny thing about Tom—he seems to have disappeared! Hmm—I wonder. . . .

THE END

SPACE HAZARDS

by J.B. RANGE

A TERRIBLE HAZARD CONFRONTING EARLY ADVENTURERS INTO THE INTERSTELLAR VOID MAY BE DRIFTING SPACE-WARPS... SILENT, INVISIBLE, EVER PRESENT, AND WAITING TO SNARE THE UNWARY PILOT AND CREW INTO HYPER-SPACE!

A BLINDING FLASH, A JOLT! THEN WONDERMENT — FOR THE FAMILIAR STARS HAVE VANISHED, AND IN THEIR PLACE ARE STRANGE NEW CONSTELLATIONS AND NEBULAE... UNNAMED, UNCHARTED! LANDING THEIR SPACECRAFT ON A PLANET OF THE NEAREST SYSTEM, THE TRAPPED MEN SEEK INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE HOPE OF SCIENTIFIC AID — BUT THE CRUEL HYPERSPATIAL UNIVERSE HAS SPAWNED ONLY SAVAGE, HUMANOID BEASTS! THE EARTHLINGS PASS ON TO THE NEXT PLANET, THEN TO THE NEXT SYSTEM...

UNTIL, AT LAST, AS THEY EXPLORE THE MURKY DEPTHS OF AN OCEAN-WORLD UPON WHOSE HEAVING SURFACE FLOAT THE SILENT, ROTTING SPACE SHIPS OF OTHERS LESS FORTUNATE CREWS, THEIR INSTRUMENTS DETECT A SPACE-WARP CLOSE BY! INSTANTLY BLASTING OFF, THEY ENTER IT AND ARE TOSSED BACK INTO OUR KNOWN UNIVERSE — AND SAFETY!

FUTURA

by John Douglas

FUTURA'S UNCONQUERABLE SPIRIT AND SUPERIOR INTELLIGENCE HAVE WON FOR HER THE BATTLE AGAINST THE CUNNING RULERS OF OCEANIA, AND THOSE VASE-BODIED HEADS LAY BELOW IN THEIR FLOODED CAVERNS. BUT IN THAT WILD ESCAPE-RIDE, FUTURA'S SHIP WAS SHATTERED... AND NOW A TROOP OF WINGED FISHERMEN CLAIM HER FOR THEIR PRIZE...

DO NOT RESIST, BLARGO! LET THEM TAKE US!" FUTURA SHRIEKS, "IN THEM ALONE LIES OUR SALVATION!"

ELATED AT SUCH UNEXPECTED SUBMISSION, THE FISHERMEN LEAD THEIR CAPTIVES TO THE SINKING SPACER'S DECK. THE HORROR-STRICKEN EARTHGIRL GASPS, "WE WOULD HAVE DIED IN THIS DESOLATED PLACE IF THEY HAD NOT COME."

"THIS WAY! WE WILL CLIMB YONDER CRAG," AMON, THE LEADER, IMPATIENTLY URGES. "OUR SPACER WILL HOVER OVER IT AND DROP US THEIR BOARDING LADDERS."

SO THEN STARTS A LONG AND TEDIOUS CLIMB UPWARD, FOR THEY **MUST** REACH THE CREST.

BUT FUTURA'S WAY IS MADE EASIER AS STRONG ARMS REACH TO HELP HER. "ONE MUST GUARD **HIS** PRIZE!" AMON AFFIRMS.

FINALLY, WEARY AND BREATHLESS, THEY REACH THE TOP. AMON GAZES INTO FUTURA'S EYES, "BEAUTIFUL!" HE GASPS.

"REPULSIVE BEAST!" FUTURA REFLECTS, "BUT I NEED HIM TO HELP US ESCAPE THIS BARREN WASTELAND. I MUST NOT ANTAGONIZE HIM YET!"

MEANWHILE, IN THE HEADS' CAVERN FAR BELOW THE SURFACE, WATER CASCADES FROM THE SMASHED CEILING...

"QUICK! QUICK! TO THE ESCAPE CAPSULE BEFORE WE ARE TRAPPED!" SCREAMS A HAIRY HIRELING.

"DELAY THE LAUNCHING!" ANOTHER SHOUTS, AND BENDS DOWN BESIDE THE LAST REMAINING RULER. "LET US CARRY YOU TO SAFETY!"

"NO! IT IS TOO LATE!" WEAKENING THOUGHT WAVES WHISPER, "GO, MY FOLLOWERS. ESCAPE AND PUNISH THAT EARTHGIRL!"

THEN SILENCE, AS LOYAL HENCHMEN PAUSE FOR ONE BRIEF MOMENT OF REVERENCE. THEN MAD SCRAMBLING INTO THE CAPSULE.

AND IT IS OFF! STRAIGHT TOWARD THE HOLE BLASTED BY FUTURA'S SPACER.

AND IN THE INTERVAL, FUTURA AND HER CAPTORS HAVE REACHED THE CRAG'S APEX. HERE THEY PAUSE, AWAITING THE COMING OF THE SHIP.

"UP! UP WT COMES! STAND BY TO CLIMB THE LADDER!" THEY URGE BY VOICE AND NONE TO GENTLE HANDLING.

"LET GO OF ME!" FUTURA CRIES, "STOP THIS PUSHING, WE WILL GO WITH YOU. DO YOU THINK WE WOULD CHOOSE TO BE MAROONED ON THIS ROCK? LET GO!"

"SORRY, EARTHGIRL, OUR ROUGHNESS WAS NOT INTENDED. WE WERE BUT ANXIOUS NOT TO LOSE SUCH A BEAUTY-PRIZE AS YOU. WHO SHOUTS THAT ALARM, AND WHY?"

"THAT GUARD! HE SEES SOMETHING! COME LET'S LOOK!"

"IT IS A WATER SPOUT! NO! NO! AN ESCAPE CAPSULE FROM THE CAVERNS!"

AND FROM THAT VESSEL, MEN PEER AND POINT, "OUR QUARRY THERE ATOP THAT PEAK. FULL SPEED AHEAD!"

"HUMAN MONSTERS ATTACKING," SCREAMS AMON, "SEE HOW THEY CLAMBER UP TO REACH US. FIGHT! FIGHT! AND GIVE NO QUARTER!"

THEN SCREAMS OF RAGE AND PAIN AS WEAPONS CLASH AND MUSCLES STRAIN. AND BACK ARE FORCED THE BIRDMEN!

WHEN SUDDENLY FUTURA'S VOICE ECHOES ABOVE THE DIN OF BATTLE, "THEY COME FOR ME, GIVE ME THAT SWORD!"

FORWARD SHE PLUNGES TO MEET THE ONSLAUGHT, HER WEAPON GLEAMING IN THE BLAZING SUN! "RALLY, MEN, DRIVE THESE BEASTS BACK TO THE SEA!"

INSTANTLY, A HUMAN MAELSTROM OF TWISTING, STRAINING BODIES! FUTURAS CHALLENGE-CRY HAS ROUSED THE BIRDMEN'S FIGHTING FURY!

SHE SPOTS THE LEADER, RUSHES TOWARD HIM, FEINTS WITH HER SWORD... HE RECOILS...LOSES FOOTING...FALLS!

NOW ONLY "WIPE-UP" OPERATIONS, AS THE DEFEATED UNDER-GROUNDERS FLEE BEFORE THE BIRDMENS VICTORY CRIES.

AND SOON, ABOVE, ON THE FISHERMEN'S CRAFT, WINCHES CREAK AND GROAN. THE RESCUE PLATFORM AND LADDERS ARE BEING LOWERED.

AND ON THE CRAG, THE BIRDMEN REVERT TO BULLYING TACTICS... ALL FORGETFUL THAT FUTURA AND BLARGO SAVED THEIR SKINS!

"THE GIRL IS EXHAUSTED. I WILL LIFT HER ABOARD. YOU GET THAT FAT HENCHMAN MOVING!"

"HOIST AWAY!" THE SHOUT ECHOES THE VASTNESS. AND ONCE AGAIN THE WINCHES TURN, THIS TIME LIFTING THE NOW CROWDED PLATFORM.

AND MINUTES LATER, HELPING HANDS GUIDE THE PRISONERS ONTO THE FISHERMEN'S ANCIENT CRAFT.

"I HOPE THIS MEANS GOODBYE TO OCEANIA FOREVER," FUTURA SIGHS. "BUT WHAT NOW, I WONDER?"

AMON, THE LEADER HEARS HER MUTTERED WORDS, "I WILL ANSWER THAT!" HE BOASTS, "YOU ARE MINE!"

"YES, WE WILL HEAD FOR HOME. YOU WILL BE MY BRIDE!"

"YOUR BRIDE?" FUTURA WHEELS, AND LIKE A TIGRESS CONFRONTS HIM, "NO MAN SPEAKS THUS TO ME!"

"TAKE OFF THIS WILDCAT! LET ME GO FREE!" AMON SCREAMS AS FUTURA UNLEASHES HER FURY.

DESPERATELY HE TRIES TO DODGE HER ONSLAUGHT... LOSES FOOTING... FALLS...

A SICKENING PLUNGE... A DISTANT SPLASH...

"LOOK! THAT SEA SPIDER CHARGING TOWARD HIM. GIVE ME A PAIR OF WINGS, I'LL SAVE HIM!" FUTURA GASPS.

BUT RESTRAINING HANDS CLUTCH HER, "TOO LATE, FUTURA, TOO LATE!"

TURNING FROM THE AWESOME SIGHT, SHE CONFRONTS THE CREW, "YOUR FACES CHANGE. YOU SMILE AT ME, WHERE ONCE YOU FROWNED. WHY?"

"YOU ARE OUR RULER NOW, FUTURA, YOU CONQUERED OUR CHIEF! BRING THE CROWN," ONE ANSWERS.

"BUT A LITTLE WHILE AGO, THESE MEN WERE MY JAILERS, AND NOW I AM DESTINED TO RULE THEM", FUTURA REMINISCES AS THE GOLDEN CROWN ADORNS HER CURLY LOCKS.

"ARISE, MY PEOPLE, GET TO YOUR STATIONS. PILOT, FULL SPEED TOWARD HOME," SHE ORDERS.

"IT SHALL BE DONE, MY CAPTAIN," THE PILOT ANSWERS, "AND WE HOPE YOU WILL LIKE OUR PLANET!"

AND LIKE A SILVER STREAK, THE SPACER FLASHES ACROSS THE HEAVENS. WHEN SUDDENLY, THE VIDEO CRACKLES... "ATTENTION ALL SHIPS!"

AND FUTURA GAZES INTO THE INSTRUMENT... SEES A SPACE PATROLMAN, LISTENS AS HE SPEARS, "THE EARTHGIRL, FUTURA, IS STILL A FUGITIVE FROM JUSTICE, BUT WE WILL GET HER YET!"

"STILL HAUNTED BY THE PAST," SHE MUTTERS, "BUT SOME DAY I WILL FACE THOSE CHARGES AND BE CLEARED!"

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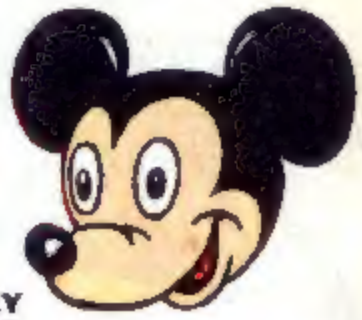

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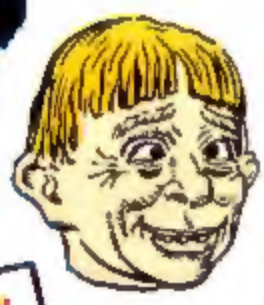

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